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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

EIU RANDOMLY SELECTED FOR GENDER EQUITY STUDY

CHARLESTON, IL--Eastern Illinois University is among universities randomly selected by the U.S. Education Department's Office for Civil Rights for a review of its sports programs to see if they are complying with federal laws against sex discrimination.

One other university in this region, Northern Michigan University, was also selected for review during this fiscal year.

The civil rights office is in charge of enforcing Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the law that bars sex discrimination at educational institutions that receive federal aid.

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Eastern Athletic Director Mike Ryan, who is coordinating the university's response to the review along with Acting Director of Affirmative Action Cynthia Nichols, pointed out that the review was not sparked by complaints of alleged gender bias. Rather, OCR has undertaken its own review of Eastern and made its selection on a random basis.

Ryan said, "It's part of OCR's overall enforcement responsibilities to look at what provisions colleges have for providing equal opportunity in athletic programming.

"Eastern is committed to equity in the provision of athletic participation opportunities and has taken efforts in the past to increase intercollegiate athletic participation opportunities for women, and will continue such efforts in the future, regardless of the findings of this review."

He added, "We will cooperate fully with the review and take corrective action if necessary."

Ryan said the university is currently in the process of collecting various data on the administration of its intercollegiate athletic programs, which will be submitted to OCR by the end of April. Although OCR has not given Eastern officials a specific deadline for completion of this review, it is expected to be a lengthy process.

At some point in the summer or fall, OCR will be sending a review team to meet with members of the university community.

Eastern President David Jorns plans to appoint a self-study

committee to analyze the data collected for the OCR review and integrate it into the university's overall strategic plan.

"The timing of this review by the Office of Civil Rights coincides with the planning project we have outlined for the university, which is designed to help us make the best use of our resources, define our mission and determine our future.

"We will use the data collected for the OCR review to conduct our own self-study. Recommendations made during the self-study will be analyzed and incorporated into the university's strategic plan. The ultimate objective will be to assure that Eastern continues to offer equitable athletic opportunities for all its students."

He said some things that OCR representatives will be looking for are whether male and female participants are being provided with equivalent benefits, opportunities and treatment and whether the athletic interests and abilities of men and women are being accommodated to the same degree, with respect to participation opportunities, team competition levels and the selection of sports offered.

Jorns commented, "While we cannot speculate what the outcome of the review will be, we maintain that Eastern is committed to the spirit of compliance with Title IX. We will, however, continue to closely monitor gender equity in intercollegiate athletics."